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India will soon witness the launch of its first air train at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport in Delhi, connecting Terminal 2/3 and Terminal 1.

Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) has issued a tender for the construction of the Automated People Mover (APM), which will span 7.7 km and include four stops: T2/3, T1, Aerocity, and Cargo City.

GMR-backed DIAL has provided the alignment for the route, aiming to replace the current DTC buses used to shuttle passengers between these terminals. The bids for the project are expected to be received in October and November 2024. The winning bidder will be selected based on the cost and whether they propose a revenue-sharing model or seek viability gap funding.

“If everything proceeds smoothly, a contract will be awarded before the end of this fiscal year, with construction expected to be completed by the end of 2027,” reported The Times of India. This timeline has reportedly been communicated to the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation by DIAL.

The APM system is set to be developed on a design, build, finance, operate, and transfer (DBFOT) model. It aims to offer a faster, more efficient, and environmentally friendly transit option between terminals. The project is also expected to improve passenger convenience, boost the airport's ASQ (airport service quality) score, and reduce its carbon footprint.

The aviation ministry has emphasised that no development fees will be levied on passengers to fund the project before its completion. Although the exact cost of the air train remains unclear, early estimates suggest it could be under Rs 2,000 crore.

Delhi Airport, India's busiest hub, handles over 70 million passengers annually — a number expected to double in the next six to eight years. Seamless transfers between terminals will be crucial, especially as 25 per cent of passengers are expected to be transit flyers.

Globally, airport air trains are typically free for passengers and play a vital role in enhancing connectivity within large airports.